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# DER finds 21 polluted wells

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HES  
2-16-83

YORK — The Department of Environmental Resources has advised 11 Union Township families that their water is unsafe for drinking or culinary uses.

DER Sanitarian Ed Shaw released the results of tests to 53 Union Township wells Friday. Of those 53 wells, 21 have organic contamination, and 11 of those are polluted above "health-risk level." The families with contamination above that level have been advised to use bottled water, an outside source of water or take some steps toward decreasing the water's toxicity.

"The decision to sample started with one well," Shaw said. "Solid Waste (a DER bureau) and the engineer for Keystone Landfill found one spring contaminated off-site (of the landfill). After that, it (the sampling project) kind of moved out."

The spring mentioned by Shaw belongs to Emma Mundorff and was tested in 1983. On March 28, 1983, Shaw sent Mrs. Mundorff a letter telling her that carcinogens 1,1-Dichloroethylene and 1,1,1-Trichloroethylene were found in the spring in amounts exceeding health-risk levels.

Letters warning citizens that water is "unsatisfactory for drinking or culinary purposes" have gone out to township residents Mary Minor, Don Shanfelter, Kenneth Hull, Brenda Shank, William Baugher, James Hilker, John Bentzel, Robert Brown, Adam Lockner, and Kenneth Koontz.

Some of the other contaminants found in area wells include trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE), benzene, chloroform, 1,1-dichloroethylene (1,1 DCE) and others. All of these contaminants present a health risk if found in high enough concentrations.

The health-risk levels are determined by the National Academy of Science and the Environmental Protection Agency's Cancer Assessment Group. Shaw said the two organizations set different health levels for many chemicals, and the DER goes by the strictest level when determining whether the water is unsafe. For example, the National Academy of Science sets the health-risk level for tetrachloroethylene (PCE) at 3.5 parts per billion, while the EPA group sets the level at 1.0 parts per billion. Shaw said any water with 1.0 parts per billion of PCE will be deemed unfit.

Shaw said the levels of contamination in the Union Township water were low in comparison to those found in Hopewell Township and at the Westinghouse plant in Straban Township, but he said, "It is enough contamination that we are investigating to find what the water quality is for the citizens and what are the health risks for individuals. We're still looking for what the source or sources are."

Shaw said all of the wells have been tested for man-made organic contamination, while some of those have also been tested for metal contamination.

Some of those wells have shown both organic and metal contamination. He said the organic contaminants are never "supposed to be there" because they are a man-made product. The metals, however, could come from an outside source, but he said they also could come from the pipes or they could be normal for the area.

Mary Minor of CURE said, "They don't know enough about it yet. If you were told you had 1.5 parts of ethane and 2.5 parts of something else . . . would you use the water? That's our position."

Only two wells had any inorganic contamination above the health levels. A 1,000 parts per billion level for copper was exceeded in two wells: Alan Eby (1,020 ppb) and Richard Groft (4,040 ppb). The Eby well was also found to have 17.5 ppb of nitrate. A health-risk level of 10 ppb for nitrate is set for infants up to age 6 months. Too much nitrate causes a condition called Blue Baby, where the child's oxygen supply is depleted by the presence of too much nitrate, Shaw said.

More well testing in the area is forthcoming, Shaw said.

Shaw said the DER does not offer financial assistance to families advised not to use their water. The department has advised the families to use either bottled water, boil the water or take some other actions toward reducing the toxicity.

The DER has also discussed the possibility of a township public water system and the grants and loans available for such a system Shaw said.

AR500015